

2005 NATIONAL SALUTE TO HOSPITALIZED VETERANS

WHEN: Week of February 8-14

WHERE: All VA medical centers and clinics

WHO: National and local celebrities, youth groups (schools, Scouts, Campfire and others), members of the general public and veterans service organizations will visit patients at VA medical centers, nursing homes, state veterans homes and other facilities.

WHY: To honor hospitalized veterans; to increase community awareness of VA's role in providing comprehensive medical care to the nation's veterans; and to encourage Americans to visit hospitalized veterans and work as VA volunteers.

BACKGROUND: The annual VA National Salute program began in 1978 when VA took over sponsorship of a program started in 1974 by No Greater Love, Inc., a humanitarian organization. VA Voluntary Service staff plan and execute local programs of activities at VA medical centers. The traditional observance during the week of Valentine's Day is appropriate because the sentiments of caring and sharing match the Salute's purpose of expressing honor and appreciation to hospitalized veterans.

SPECIAL SUPPORT: For 14 years, the late newspaper columnist Ann Landers devoted her column in January to the National Salute, asking readers to send Valentine cards and letters to hospitalized veterans at their nearest VA medical centers. More than a million cards and letters are sent to VA patients each year during the National Salute. This tradition is carried on this year by the "Annie's Mail Box" reader advice column edited by Landers' long-time associates Kathy Mitchell and Marcy Sugar.